

**Natural Resources Conservation Service
State Technical Committee
10:00am Tuesday, October 03, 2017
UACES State Office, Little Rock, AR**

Agenda and Handouts (attached)

Members Present: Sign in list attached

Meeting called to order by Randy Childress, Asst. State Conservationist for Easements, acting in State Conservationist stead.

Introductions were made by the participants and Randy expressed Mike Sullivan, Arkansas NRCS State Conservationist appreciation for the subcommittee members. He talked about the increased workload, shortage in staff along with a hiring freeze but the staff has managed with agreements.

- 50 agreements with districts
- Arkansas NRCS will finish #1 nationally in financial assistance, largely due to staff and conservation partner efforts.
- Funded 22 projects through competitive call for agreement proposals- projects providing technical assistance, establishing urban gardens, conducting outreach and more.
- Expect to conduct another competitive call for agreement proposals in FY18

Recommendations summary from spring meeting – Amanda Mathis

(Handout attached)

- Recommendation from Energy to focus on old technology rather than life span could not be adopted due to conflicts with national policy.
- Recommendation from the Water Quality Subcommittee to propose Greasy Creek as a new priority watershed has now been submitted to HQ for approval.
- Recommendation from Soil Health Subcommittee to encourage more field days and outreach including optional training seminars.
 - Reminded them of the Southern Agriculture Soil Health and Water Management Training Seminar on December 12 – 13, 2017 at the Wyndham Hotel, NLR

Priority Resource Concerns – Edgar Mersiovsky

(Three handouts – 2012, 2017 and Major Resource Concern categories)

Edgar explained that NRCS uses a science based process to determine at risk acres for the 9 major resource concerns (and subcategories) NRCS recognizes. It is important to prioritize and focus more on a few of the most significant RCs in the state. The last time priorities were set was 2012.

2012 Resource Concern Priority Area

Insufficient/Excess Water Resource Concern

Degraded Plant Condition- Inadequate Structure and Composition

Degraded Plant Condition- Undesirable Plant Productivity and Health

Inadequate Habitat for Fish and Wildlife- Habitat Degradation

Water Quality- Excess Nutrients in Surface and Ground Waters

Degraded Plant Condition- Wildfire Hazard (focused on area affected by 2010 Ice storm)

With new information from the recent update to the SRA, NRCS has reviewed and updated the priority resource concerns and maps and is seeking input into the proposed revisions.

2017 Proposed Resource Concern Priority Areas

Insufficient/Excess Water Resource Concern

- Inefficient Use of Irrigation Water – added Phillips County (2016)
- Based on the counties with the Critical Groundwater designation

Degraded Plant Condition- Inadequate Structure and Composition

Degraded Plant Condition- Undesirable Plant Productivity and Health

- Due to past drought, parts of SW AR are now included

Inadequate Habitat for Fish and Wildlife- Habitat Degradation

- Area expanded in North Central AR.

Water Quality- Excess Nutrients in Surface and Ground Waters

- Area expanded to capture CAFO expansions
- Entire Nutrient Surplus Area will need to be added to map

Soil Quality Degradation- Organic Matter Depletion (New priority)

- Recommendation to add acres with med-high at risk threat (orange areas)

Wildfire hazard was not added due to lack of defined area and they were scattered all over the state and it was felt that concerns from 2010 ice storm have been addressed.

Edgar called for open comments regarding other resource concerns that we should consider for priority- no recommendations. All supported current priorities with discussed revisions.

National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) Update – Teri Nehls

- 2016 participated in a pilot planning program
 - HUC 12 watershed – Year 1 do a watershed resource assessment
 - Identify the critical acres which can demonstrate the highest level of success
 - Year 2 – funding to landowners to address those critical acres
- 2018 –added Greasy Creek and Strawberry River as a planning watershed
 - Primarily grazing and forestry
- Existing three approved Bayou Bartholomew watersheds (Jefferson & Lincoln Counties)
 - Review the ranking to see if we are getting the critical acres in those counties
 - Place more emphasis on the area between the edge of field and the ditch
 - Resource concerns involve the whole field not just the edge of the field
 - Promote 2 stage ditches
 - Keep the initial three priority watersheds
 - Bayou Bartholomew, Upper Deep and Cousart Bayou - funding
 - Greasy Creek and Strawberry River – assessment & planning
- Water Quality Subcommittee Report
 - Edge of Field applications – Phillips County
 - Comparison between poultry litter versus commercial fertilizer
 - Recommendation to reduce the number of sensors mandated due to size and scope of some farms
 - Subcommittee was provided information on acres and practices and requested a report on where the funds are spent – that request is being processed

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program – Randy Childress

(Handout attached)

- Asked for an additional \$15 million and received it.

- Carried over \$5 million from the TNC WREP.
- 251,593 acres on 657 easements.
- Arkansas was the only state that achieved a “green light” for easement management on NHQ scorecard
- Nationally it is moving to a “team approach” – Arkansas has asked to be left out.
- Arkansas can close on an easement within 7 months – nationally it is much longer
- Geographic Area Rate Cap (GARC) Appraisals are separated regionally – three different areas
 - Arkansas River Valley - \$2,400/ac
 - Mississippi River Valley - \$2,900/ac
 - Gulf Coastal Plain - \$2,400/ac
- MS is higher and LA is lower in price per acre
- Ranking criteria (attached)
 - Added a pasture land category
 - No other changes to the ranking criteria
 - Applications are scoring higher
 - Continue to see good applications due to commodity prices, age of landowners, etc.
 - Another WREP announcement at the end of 2017
 - HQ is trying to get these funds out before the Farm Bill expires

Financial Assistance Program Updates – Jena Moore, NRCS

(See PowerPoint slides attached)

Conservation Stewardship Program

- General sign up
 - Agri – Beginning Farmer & Rancher – 46 contracts - \$390,320
 - Agri – East – 218 contracts - \$2,934,000+
 - Agri – West – 56 contracts - \$261,379
 - MRBI (Tupelo/Beaverdam)– 4 contracts - \$261,379
 - Agri- Socially Disadvantaged – 21 contracts - \$87,400
 - Non-Industrial Private Forestland – 10 contracts - \$33,304
 - NIPF – 48 contracts - \$230,871
 - NEPF SD – 2 contracts - \$3,641
 - Total 405 contracts - \$3,982,625 (allocation for 2017 payment only)
- 2017 – General Conservation Stewardship Program
 - Broken down by the counties
 - Better participation in the livestock and forestry acres due to increased outreach and changes to the CSP ranking
 - 974 applications were processed but all could not be funded
 - 405 contracts were funded even though all 974 contracts had to be processed
 - Doug Akin, AFC, asked the question if forestry applications are judged only against forestry applications – Jenna said yes
- RCPP - CSP
 - Bayou Meto-Lower Arkansas – 8 - \$154,000
 - Rice Stewardship Partnership – 25 - \$423,471
- 2019 Program Year
 - HQ has not provided national guidance
 - Conservation practice enhancements can be added before December, 22, 2017
 - Participants were encouraged to work with their Subcommittee Chairman if they have recommended changes for CSP in FY19

- Payment rates are developed nationally but NRCS can submit alternative payment scenarios if provided by subcommittee
- 2018 enhancements have not been provided so some concern was expressed about requesting changes to 2019 enhancements without seeing 2018

FY2017 EQIP Obligation Summary – Cory Farmer, NRCS

- 1,511 contracts – Obligations - \$44,806,000+
- FY 2018 EQIP & CSP Implementation Timeline (Draft)
- Application deadline is November 17 for most categories
 - CSP – General has not been set by NHQ
 - Provide EQIP training to Field offices – Week of October 30, 2017
 - Provide CSP Training to Field offices – November 17, 2017

Conservation Innovation Grants and RCPP update – Lori Barker, NRCS

(Handout attached)

- RCPP Project summaries provided
- Conservation Innovation Grants
 - If some category is not included please share that information with the staff
 - Lori will be setting her deadlines so it coordinates with the national deadlines
 - Categories include state, regional & national
 - She offered to provide assistance to anyone wishing more information or wants to apply
 - December 20, 2017 is the deadline for any changes to the Areas of Concern

Feral Assistance Program Update – James Baker, NRCS Wildlife Specialist, NRCS

- Four years into the program we have seen 3,500 hogs removed from the land
- Eight counties part of pilot– Desha, Arkansas, Chicot, Yell, Searcy, Pope, Sevier & Drew
- Recommendation from review group: drop Chicot & Pope Counties due to lack of interest
- Recommendation from review group: add Ashley, Sebastian & IZard Counties and possibly Baxter County
- Technology has been ever-changing which has posed issues
- Dedicated manpower has been an issue
- NRCS will be working with partner agencies to provide more technical assistance to landowners
- UACES & NRCS are investigating the possible use of TSPs for TA.
- Feral Swine Eradication Task Force – state legislature directed the Arkansas Agriculture Dept. to put together a team to address this issue.
 - Kaput has been discussed but there are some concerns due to toxicity and whether landowners will follow the guidelines to use the chemical safely.

Amanda Mathis provided the group an opportunity for open discussion regarding any topic- no concerns/questions were raised.

The Spring State Technical Committee Meeting is scheduled for 10:00 am, May 22, 2018 at the U of A Cooperative Extension State Office, 2301 South University, Little Rock, AR 72205

Meeting adjourned at 12:15pm.

Attendees:

Randy Childress, NRCS
Edgar Mersiovsky, NRCS
Bubba Groves, AGFC
Brittany Singleton, UACES
Josh Hankins, USA Rice
John Bailey, ArFB
Jena Moore, NRCS
Cory Nelson, NRCS
Eugene Young, NASS
Vincent Geogory, U.S Corps
Becky McPeake, UACES
Walt Delp, NRCS
Diana Colvard, FSA
Ryan Benefield, ANRC
Helen Dennison, NRCS
Karen Thompson, NRCS
Joe Krystofik, USFWS
Ryan Deiner, QuailForever
Darren Spinks, AFC
Reggie Jackson, NRCS
Lauren Ward, Arkansas Rice Federation
John McAlpine, Drew County
James McLarty, Beaver Water
Corey Farmer, NRCS
Shanon Griffin, NRCS
Tim Willis, DU
Andrew Grobmyer, AgCouncil
Wes Ward, AR Ag Dept

Amanda Mathis, NRCS
Martha Manley, AACD
Bill Holiman, ANHC
Emily Woodall, USA Rice
Van Banks, ALFDC
Andrew Wargo III, Desha County
Norman Wagoner, USFS
Matt Lindsay, Delta Plastics
Adrian Baber, ANRC
Jeremy Huff, NRCS
George Rheinhardt, NRCS
Tony Ramick, ANRC
Doug Akin, AFC
Kennard Williams, NRCS
Teri Nehls, NRCS
Melvin Tobin, USFWS
Alan Fortenberry, Beaver Water
Ted Zawislak, AGFC
Susan Rupp, Envirosapes
Debbie Moreland, AACD
Jim Baker, NRCS
Vic Ford, UACES
Lori Barker, NRCS
Alvin Peer, NRCS
Joseph Schafer, Winrock Int'l
Stephen Lagasse, RD
Rick Monk, USFS